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THE NINTH CRUISER SQUADRON.

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I.

EVERYBODY knows of the deeds of the Tenth Cruiser Squadron, and of its magnificent patrol—the Patrol of the Royal Naval Reserve—between Scotland and Iceland, which, through every minute of the war, in fair weather and in the foulest of the foul, tooth-combed sea-traffic, and maintained the blockade, until there was no longer any need for its activities: but who has ever heard of the Ninth Cruiser Squadron?

Most properly, nobody. Its very existence, which began on August 4, 1914, was kept unknown, mysterious: the hush of the high seas closed it in, and it had ceased to exist, its useful functions over, some considerable time before the music and the shouting of 11th November 1918.

Its last gasp, therefore, was
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drawn in the same mystery and war-silence as its first.

The squadron was composed, in about equal proportions, of armed merchant cruisers and of naval cruisers: the latter being these too old (fortunately for them) to be attached to the live-bait squadron, thus escaping fellowship with the *Aboukir*, *Cressy*, and *Hogue*; but still, in spite of their very grey hairs, considered able to keep the sea, and to control the South American and South African trade routes, for this was the venue of the "Ninth C.S."

The base of the squadron was "The Flagship, at Sea"; our home was on the wave; our station-limits, the blue, the ever-shifting meeting-point of sea and sky. For us existed no comfortable harbour, with gun defences and boom defences and destroyer patrol, and sub-

marine patrol and trawler patrol. We moved on the face of the waters by day and by night, without haste (except on high occasions, for coal was precious), without rest; with some of our aching eyes fixed on the far round horizon for ships, and some, still more aching, on the near wave-crests for submarines, our guns loaded, our fingers (so to speak) on the triggers.

The ceaseless watch was never interrupted, not even by the diversification due to the holding-up of ships—this latter a daily and a nightly proceeding, undertaken almost thankfully as a break in the monotony—not even by the coalings, which had to take place every eight or ten days at Madeira, under the “friendly neutrality” (which afterwards became complete alliance) of Portugal. At work at sea, or coaling in harbour, the guns remained manned, the look-outs incessantly looking out.

When the menace of submarines round Madeira became really distinct and close, we moved south: first to St Vincent, in the Cape de Verde Islands, that horrid, torrid group of wind-swept coinders; and lastly, to the even hotter, but at least verdant harbour of Sierra Leone—“the best ’ole of all,” as it was defended by a boom!

The cruisers with which we started in 1914 had already, for several years, been reeling in senile decay on various scrap-heaps, or else were in gentle employment as “overflow-ships” to crowded naval

depots, training ships for stokers (though never leaving harbour), and so forth.

But, with the first trump of war, like Sam Weller’s “werry old donkey,” they were lugged up off their death-bed to “take sixteen gen’lemen to Greenwich on a tax-cart.” Anything for air and exercise, indeed!

Out they went at once into the broad Atlantic, and gallantly did they attempt to recover the spring of a youth now nearly twenty years behind them. After about a year of it, the first of the old ships to get away, the *Amphitrite* and *Argonaut*, were relieved, and steamed home at the very respectable speed of 16 knots; each of them having covered nearly 30,000 miles since leaving England, and each having consumed nearly 25,000 tons of coal in so doing. But when you consider that this speed could be exceeded by at least six knots by the foe we were out to catch—the *Karlsruhe*—and that the outranging by her guns of ours was in like proportion, you will wonder, as we did, why that particular foe, knowing these facts, did not come over to our side of the Atlantic to “take us on.”

What fat cargoes might not the Germans then have snatched, waddling home from the Plate and from the Cape, slow, helpless! But they kept maddeningly clear of us, and made up all their “bags” over 1000 miles away.

As to the armed merchant cruisers, the other half of our squadron, they, of course, were

the mightiest bluff of all: a fact scarcely yet comprehended, and not even dimly imagined in the autumn of 1914.

It was, indeed, the usual opinion that we had here a real, new, swift, and deadly arm—fully capable of pursuing, catching, engaging, and sinking the *Karlsruhe*, or any other commerce-destroyer. Piquancy was added to the position by the thought that the Merchant Navy was defending itself, and the realisation that there was something in the Royal Naval Reserve after all.

There was, indeed, as we of the White Ensign speedily discovered—and a splendid something, too; but as to their ships, we, who helped to man and “run” them on man-of-war principles, had few illusions as to their capabilities. Our hearts were big, we were thoroughly keen for a trial; but faith in our 14,000-ton leviathans was largely tempered with hope for a happy ending to any encounter with a *real* cruiser constructed for fighting. There was a sporting chance, we supposed—there always is—so “*Vive le Sport!*”

The Port of Liverpool, where the conversion of their most cherished and most enormous monsters into fighting ships reached its maddest height during that first month of the war, was a wonderfully thrilling sight. No one could regard all that day-and-night energy without being convinced that it must be producing some great new things; that here was the Sea Horse of Britain, taken from the peaceable ploughing

of the waves, being caparisoned for the fray, impatiently foaming at the bit, neighing, and saying “Ha, ha” among the captains (R.N.)!

Every side of every basin in the docks held against it a vast dark hull. Overhead, in the roofs of the equally vast and dark sheds that flanked the hulls and sheltered the enormous piles of ships’ stores removed from them, there looked down the brilliant and unrelenting eyes of the arc lights, cold and green. There was neither night-time, nor day-time, nor meal-time; nothing but working-time, at twenty-four hours per diem.

Every orifice in those hulls—entry-ports, coaling-ports, cargo-ports—carried a gangway from it down to the wharf; and along these there surged in both directions an intensely busy army in single file, closed up. Some hurried into the ships empty-handed; some hurried out of them, bearing on their shoulders burdens of cabin-fittings, inlaid woodpanelling, china, glass, every conceivable and inconceivable article designed for the comfort of the pampered passenger, or merely for his “look-see”—all now suddenly become useless and contemptible in the face of the real thing.

Each man’s face, shining with sweat, white with sleeplessness, radiated forth that strange delight in destruction which inhabits all of us; while from within the rapidly emptying shells of the great ships there resounded on all sides the wild exciting din of demolition—

the bang, whang, crash, smash, of those who hammered, and wrenched, and levered, and forcibly unscrewed.

The work was not, however, so destructive as it sounded. Every article and every panel was marked with the name of the ship and the part of her from whence it came—even its consecutive number, as paneling. In those hopeful days we thought the things would each soon be going back again into its place! Each description of removed fittings was piled in monster pyramids, according to its class, abreast of the ship whence it had been eviscerated. The amounts of these, for any one ship, were staggering to the ordinary uncalculating mind. From the *Aquitania*, for example, the weight of glass-ware alone came to no less than 40 tons. (This fact, however, will carry easy belief with any one who has handled the water decanters and tumblers usual to passenger steamers.)

Upon a certain Monday evening arrived from her "trade" our ship, a luxuriously equipped hotel, soft and "cushy" at every turn, fair to see, attractively painted; her funnels in strongly contrasting glossy black and the most vermilion of fresh red-lead. "Ah," said her former Sootch captain reminiscently, later on, on regarding a coloured picture of his ship-of-peace, "Yon's a bonny funnel!"

On the following Sunday morning we left the docks, stark and stripped, grey all over, as nearly a man-of-war

as was possible to be bluffed, white ensign and pendant complete.

Within the intervening 132 hours, the ship had been gutted of all her cabins on every deck; stripped of all panelling everywhere; eight 6-inch guns had been mounted, the ship's framework and supporting deck had been strengthened to match; and magazines and shell-rooms had been built. Besides this, stores for the ship, food for her company, her guns, and her boilers, had been hoisted in by the hundred ton—coal, indeed, by the thousand ton; officers and men had been appointed, had joined, and taken charge.

Aladdin's lamp must have begun to think about hiding its pale ineffectual fire!

A short gun-trial outside the Bar lightship, which passed us sound as regards guns and fittings: a last letter home in the mysteriously veiled language that later became so easy and expected—and we were away! The then unaccustomed secrecy as to the vessel's destination and route was interpreted in several places as meaning that we were bound to a northern port, to add one more to the troopships well known then to be engaged in hurrying thousands of Russian troops across to the north of Sootland. For, with the snow still on their beards, and the ice of Archangel in their bones (as it were, chilled beef), they had been actually seen passing southward by train through England on their way to the Front!

We were in reality bound,

that Sunday evening, to join the Ninth Cruiser Squadron; and accordingly, first, north-about round Ireland we fared, then southward-hel for the open sea near the Canary Islands, where the tracks of the Atlantic trade routes from South America and South Africa converge.

On Wednesday morning, early, a sailing-ship was sighted on our starboard bow. We were then in the chops of the Channel, well southward of Ireland, and we altered course slightly to bear down on her. As we approached she hoisted the German merchant flag and "made her number." She was the *Excelsior*, a barque of about 2500 tons, homeward bound to Bremen from New Orleans with a cargo chiefly of tobacco, and was forty days out.

Consequently she knew nothing about the war; but when informed, by international code, of the state of affairs and that she was our prize, she made no difficulties whatever; nor did there appear to be very much excitement on board.

It was too rough at the time to send a boat to visit her, taking a prize crew, so she was ordered to haul as close to the wind (which was south-westerly) as she could, and to prepare to be taken into port in our company. We altered course suitably, and promptly and meekly she followed us. It was a bloodless victory!

A wireless message to the nearest admiral soon brought

forth one of our few remaining small cruisers—the *Isis*—and to her, on the following morning, was entrusted our first prize (which had been kept closely under view in the searchlight all night), and we resumed our southerly course. She was taken into Berehaven, and subsequently was condemned in the Prize Court.

Our next experience of war-like conditions took place on arrival at the Canaries, in seeing the serried rows of German and Austrian merchant steamers anchored at Las Palmas and at Santa Cruz de Teneriffe, and afraid to move one yard outside those neutral Spanish waters. Many others of the same scared company we saw later on, who had taken refuge at the Azores, at Madeira, and in the Cape de Verde Islands, where they lay sheltering and sweltering until Portugal, to which country these groups belong, "came in" to the war. But these in the Spanish harbours remained at anchor for over four years, their bottoms rusting, their engines deteriorating, their coal and stores dwindling, their cargoes gradually being sold to pay for the upkeep of their diminishing crew, object-lessons of sea-power. Even had they been able to get clear away from their island anchorages, each would have become a homeless wanderer—a Flying Dutchman—barred from every home port and from every German colony. We felt like terriers looking at a cage of rats! They were for us a spectacle as thrilling as

it was tantalising; but while the latter feeling always remained, our compensating enjoyment of their helplessness was swallowed up in anxiety lest any one of them should make a bolt for it, and get away to join the *Karlsruhe* or other commerce-destroyer in the Atlantic, to bring her aid, coal, and provisions.

This anxiety was rendered even more poignant, shortly after, by the several arrivals at Santa Cruz of steamers fitted out as supply ships by the Germans in America, and sent to sea under neutral flags, one after the other. After fruitlessly scouring the Atlantic for several weeks, searching for the *Karlsruhe* or dodging our patrols, three of them arrived and anchored in the neutral shelter—already tautly strained—of the Canaries. It now became necessary, indeed, for the strain to be relieved somewhat; and accordingly “shelter” was converted into “internment” by the Spanish authorities (after eloquent representations, and may God guard Your Excellencies many years!) But we kept just as close a guard. The little less, and what miles away might not these ships have been, “internment” and all!

Sixteen or seventeen of these German Fleet auxiliaries, it was discovered by the justly indignant United States authorities, had been chartered in America. They cost Germany, to fit out, and for the suborning of the various captains and others concerned, about £400,000. Out of the whole lot only one, the *Berwind*,

succeeded in its mission. Of the remainder, many were prevented from so much as leaving American waters, and of those that got away some were sunk, some were captured, and the rest were detained in neutral ports. It was an expensive experiment in straining neutrality.

Besides the three so-called “neutrals” that reached our side, there was a fourth steamer on whom our straining eyes continually were fixed, named *Telde*. She was a genuine German, brand-new, and originally employed, under German colours, in the island fruit trade; but now, since war broke out, sheltering at Santa Cruz. She was of about 2500 tons, fast, convenient, inconspicuous; and accordingly she had been loaded with stores of all sorts, including gold in boxes—the whole discreetly covered over with coal (her nominal “cargo”); and having been given a Spanish “clearance” for Antofagasta, in Chile, we expected her to sail at any moment. Nothing would have been easier for her, on some moonless night, than gently to slip the cable, and gently to move away, under the high dark cliffs of Teneriffe. Even had she been seen by us to be moving, she might easily have been mistaken for one of the small Spanish inter-island steamers she so greatly resembled, and thus to have eluded pursuit. Close and anxious watch was therefore necessary. One still remembers the agonised and frequent moments when something put

forth from the anchorage at 1 A.M. (or at any old time at dead of night), the sudden forcing of steam—the palpitating pursuit in darkness—the abortive ending when, off Anaga Point (the northern end of the island), certainty was established, and we recognised that we had been chasing, not the *Telde*, but the authentic Spanish steamer “on its lawful occasion”!

But the *Telde* didn't sail out of Santa Cruz, at least not voluntarily; and, later on, she fell into our hands in the following manner.

After eighteen months of watching—namely, in May 1916—there came an unexpected, fierce, squally N.-W. wind which blew down the steep arid slopes of Teneriffe with such vehemence that it carried away the *Telde*, body and bones, anchor, cable and all, away out to sea, until, presently, she was outside territorial waters. This happened late at night, and the Germans ashore, in frantic haste, chartered a tug to rush to the scene. But “*Mañana por la Mañana*” is the admirable law of Spain, and it was daylight before she actually got away. She reached the *Telde*, however, got her safely in tow, and started to steam, for dear life, back to Santa Cruz and safety. Too late, though! While they were still on the high seas there descended on them, out of the blue, H.M.S. *Essex*. The tow was transferred, and the tug returned to her island home, sad and lonely.

Long before this event all

the German commerce-destroyers had gone to Davy Jones's Locker, and our watch over their supply-ships had therefore lost much of its acuteness and intensity. Visits were made periodically, however, to “count heads”; and on the night of the involuntary flight of the *Telde* it chanced that the *Essex* was away on such an expedition, at the time that intelligence of the drifting Hun reached the Admiral. That “bird of the air,” wireless, then “carried the message” to the *Essex*, with the above-recounted satisfactory result.

Let us get back again now to the autumn of 1914, and to the earlier days and deeds of the Canaries patrol.

First among these was the sinking by H.M.S. *Highflyer*, on August 28, of the German armed merchant cruiser *Friedrich der Grosse*.

The great liner had started forth from her home port before war with England had actually been declared, fully equipped, and commissioned to sink, burn, and destroy. She began off Iceland with some fishing vessels of ours, which she sank, capturing the crews. With them on board she sailed southward to the more interesting and more prolific trade-route from Cape Town. The unfortunate North Sea fishermen, fully accoutred in their thick “lamby” suits and immense thigh-boots,—their all,—began to melt inside them, in rapidly increasing rivers of perspiration, as the mild warmth of the Channel gradually deepened to temperatures

for which Iceland, most certainly, had not prepared them. All in the dark as they were, between decks, on an unknown course (except that it led, evidently, to the Infernal Regions), the diary of one stout skipper—stout of heart as of body,—reads pathetically, with its unfailing announcement, "Weather still warmer to-day."

It must, in fairness, be recorded of the captain of the *Friedrich der Grosse*, however, that he behaved with humanity, and even chivalry, towards his captives. He released, practically unconditionally, one steamer that he had captured, saying that he had no wish to inconvenience the lady passengers. And when, eventually, he was overtaken at the Rio de Oro, on the African coast (where he had gone for coal and repairs), and the unequal action between his ship and the *Highflyer* began, he sent away at once all his prisoners by the Spanish steamers, from which he had been coaling, together with all the non-fighting members of his crew—stewards and so forth—to get them out of the way of the shells. When he was called on by the *Highflyer* to surrender, he signalled back "A German ship never surrenders." After an hour and a quarter's respite given him for "reconsideration," the *Highflyer* opened the ball, and he replied—helpless at anchor as he was—with a broadside. Thereafter he stuck to it, with hopeless tenacity, until at last the great hull

of his ship slowly filled, turned over on its side, and so ended the affair. The dead floated out of her, and the captain, with other survivors, swam ashore to the small Spanish fort that guards the desolate harbour. Here, at least, was an honourable exponent of the best sea-manners and traditions.

When we visited the scene, three months later, the enormous rusty bilge of the *Friedrich der Grosse* still hove up its bulk out of the water, bearing so plausible a resemblance to a smooth, rounded, sandy islet, with sloping ends, that at first it was thought to be one. As we got nearer, a propeller blade just shewing above the water, and a large dark cleft down the centre of the supposed islet—tragically witness to the vessel's "broken back"—made us realise that it was indeed the mortal remains of the commerce-raider that confronted us. As her beam dimension was about 75 feet, and she was resting on her port-side on the sandy bottom in ten fathoms of water, 15 feet of her must then have been visible above it.

Behind her, at about a mile distant from where she was lying, was the low and completely desert shore of Africa, quivering in the heat. Its monotonous outline is, at this point, broken into by the shallow and swiftly-narrowing indentation named Rio de Oro. It is not any longer a river, whatever it may have been in far-back geologic ages. The fourteenth-century navi-

gators of Prince Henry of Portugal, in their search for treasure and slaves, gradually pushing their adventures southward into the mysterious and terrifying heat of the tropics, saw the gleaming mica in the sand, and supposing themselves to have reached a River of Gold, so named it. It must have been a desperate disappointment to those thirsty fortune-hunters when the true state of affairs—salt water and shiny sand—disclosed itself.

A fortnight after this first destruction by a ship of our squadron of a German armed merchant cruiser, there took place that famous and monstrous battle of leviathans—the action between the *Carmania* (also of the Ninth C.S.) and the *Cap Trafalgar*, off Trinidad Island in the mid-Atlantic, on September 14, 1914, ending in the victorious destruction of a second enemy A.M.C. The German was coaling near the island; but immediately on sighting the *Carmania* she cast off her colliers, and stood away to the westward at 18 knots. The *Carmania* stood south-west, also at full speed, to cut her off, and opened fire at four miles' distance: a space which the converging courses of the two ships reduced, in ten minutes' time, to only two miles, or 4000 yards. It was like an action of Nelsonic times. At the end of a second ten minutes, of such hammer and tongs on one side, and sturm and drang on the other, as has rarely been seen, the Ger-

man was making off hotly to the south-west, as hotly pursued. Hot indeed! Both ships were in flames: the *Cap Trafalgar* from end to end; the *Carmania* in the fore-part only: a distinction due to a characteristically German tactic. The *Cap Trafalgar* had concentrated her fire on the navigating bridge of the *Carmania*, evidently expecting that when the R.N. captain had been killed, and his conning instruments—compass, engine-room telegraph, charts—had been destroyed, there would then be "nobody" left to carry on, and nothing to carry on with.

The captain was not killed, however. Even had that disaster befallen, it would certainly not have wiped out the fighting ability of our side. There were plenty more, though not R.N., still R.N.R., eager and able to "take on"! As to the navigation, there was a second conning station at the after-end of the ship—to which, indeed, the executive were presently driven by the flames in the fore-part.

Our tactics, unlike those of the Germans, were to drive as many shots as possible into every part of the great haystack opposed to us. She couldn't be missed; and so it was that, after a chase of an hour and a quarter, the *Cap Trafalgar*, burning like Sodom and Gomorrah, swerved round a complete half circle, till she headed the pursuing *Carmania*, then capsized to starboard, and went down, head first, with colours flying.

Some of the crew were seen swimming away, and were picked up by the two colliers which had watched the action (one of which was the *Berwind*, before mentioned).

When the action began, the *Carmania* intercepted a wireless message, *en clair*, from her opponent, made to her (not distant) supporting cruiser, "I am in action with a half-cruiser." Later on, there went out—"Action over. I am giving up." On which the cruiser unkindly inquired, "Why are you giving up?" But answer there came none! At that moment the *Cap Trafalgar* was cooling her red-hot sides, as she eddied down into the 3000-fathom abysses of that part of the Atlantic. It was our *Trafalgar* again, name, and all!

Just as the last wireless message was intercepted, there was seen by the *Carmania*, on the horizon, the smoke of the German cruiser—not a "halbkreuzer"—steaming for all she was worth to the rescue—too late!

Our armed merchantman was no match for her, at any time; and now, with 304 holes in her hull, the result of hav-

ing been struck by 79 projectiles in that short, fierce, close-ranged action, there was nothing to do but to clear out, with all the 16 knots of which she was still capable. Luckily, she was not overhauled, and got safely away.

This conclusion to the action made it quite obvious to every one that "half-cruisers" must in future never move about unless supported by the Real Article. Had the German cruiser been actually with her merchant cruiser when the *Carmania* appeared on the scene, there must have been a quite different ending to the affair. On the other hand, if the *Carmania* had been supported by a real fighting ship, she need not have cleared out in that undignified fashion, but could have stayed to watch the German cruiser being bagged,—and perhaps herself put in a word or two as well. Accordingly, the order went forth at once; the banns were called; and presently each armed merchant lady of our squadron found herself wedded, for better, for worse, to a fighting mate. We were thankful, indeed!

II.

The holding up of ocean traffic for search was the most ostensible of our duties. It is axiomatic that cruiser work cannot be effective without Intelligence: and until this branch of our service became organised, our position could

best be compared with that of a policeman who had been given "London" as an address for the apprehension of a criminal. Only the ocean is a bit wider, and more vague.

At first, whatever Intelligence agencies existed for

sending to us information from South America seemed all to be in a condition of dumb rabies—or rather of dumbness, with rabid intervals. Long silences were variegated by bursts of frantic yappings and snappings. The dumb phase was bad enough, as it left everything, with us, to pure chance; but the active period was really much more troublesome to contend with.

Knowing their dove-like innocence from guile, the clever German *provocateurs* abroad easily communicated to our agents such serpent-poison, that we received thereby, periodically, the most insistent and unceasing warnings concerning the importance of intercepting ships which never sailed, and of seizing from them persons or documents that went to Germany by quite other means. Coal by the ton, sleep by the hour, anxiety and eyesight without measure, were wasted by these messages until their real origin was discovered. We were all pretty green and credulous, both afloat and ashore, in those days; but we lived through them, and learnt discrimination by degrees, and mutual support. In ocean patrol work, the Intelligence ashore and the Intelligence afloat must be two halves of the same brain, if sane and sound service is to be produced. Each must inform the other of its needs, and of its views. We were lucky, anyway, with our agents in the islands around us. They “tumbled” to our necessities at once, almost

before we asked, and were splendidly helpful; we soon found the value of keeping in as close a touch with them as neutrality laws permitted. They had a good deal to contend against ashore: it required both pluck and tact to give us the assistance we needed. The already large enemy sediment, deposited in the islands during peace time, had been considerably augmented since war began by the numbers of officers and crews of the sheltering and interned ships—many of them trained Intelligence men. They played off against us some quite skilfully conceived “belligerent acts,” through the medium of their rather unwilling but terrorised neutral hosts. The use of neutral wireless stations may be cited as an interesting instance of these activities.

There was, near Las Palmas (Gran Canaria), a powerful radio-station, capable of sending a message, on a favourable night, for about 2000 miles. Sixty miles to the westward, on Teneriffe, there is a second installation, slightly more powerful. At Cadiz, 800 miles distant, there is a third, more powerful still; and a fourth at Madrid. International Law concerning use of “wireless” in war time declares that the diplomatic agents of belligerents in neutral countries have equal rights in sending and receiving messages by wireless, in cipher or otherwise. This was instantly seized on by the Germans; and cipher messages (no doubt giving full particulars of the

sailings and cargoes of British ships) were sent out nightly from Las Palmas. They purported, of course, to be sent to the "German" or "Austrian Embassy, Madrid," and were signed "Mittelstrasse," who was Austrian consul at Las Palmas. Thus they received their "diplomatic" appearance. The messages were repeated three times over by Las Palmas (to ensure correct reception), while Teneriffe and Cadiz were both asked to pass the message on, in triplicate, one to the other, and thence to Madrid. There was no necessity whatever, it must be understood, for these "passings on," as Las Palmas was fully capable of reaching Madrid direct, on most nights, and could always "get" Cadiz; but by these means three powerful stations—Las Palmas, Teneriffe, and Cadiz—each sent out the message three times, at three different times during the night, and on three different "wave lengths." It would indeed be a wonder if the listening *Karlsruhe*, 1000 miles away, on the other side of the Atlantic, did not take in one of the nine announcements!

Representation to the local Spanish authorities availed nothing. They blandly pointed to the unmistakable wording of the law in the Hague Convention; and said that our Consuls, too, could use the Spanish wireless system if they wished, and in similar fashion. Their only desire was to be completely neutral; and God was again called on

to preserve our Excellencies many years!

But it could not be left at that; and at last we managed to stimulate the diplomatic intellect, by means of telegrams of the most "improper" wording, into realising the breach of neutrality that was taking place. This lay, of course, in the fact that while the ability to send cipher messages by wireless was of the highest naval importance to both belligerents, the Germans could send them *only* by means of the Spanish installations; while, as we had gained the command of the seas, and thus could send whatever message we liked through our own channels, the permission to us to use the Spanish radio-stations was valueless.

The advantage we had gained over our enemy by force of arms was therefore entirely nullified, through this permission to them to use the Spanish radio system. Neutrality in the matter had lapsed, and Spain was actually giving assistance to one belligerent against the other.

All this seemed to be fairly obvious; but the days, and the still more maddening nights, went by, filled with "Mittelstrasse" messages, till more than twenty of them had been sent out—and a corresponding number of British ships had been despatched from Las Palmas, possibly to their doom.

We were near taking the matter into our own hand, and destroying the Spanish wireless stations, regardless of con-

sequences, when at last the constipation of the diplomatic channel was dispelled, and the order came forth from Madrid that the cipher radio-messages were to be stopped for *both* belligerents.

Until that happened, no wonder the Germans on shore thought they had it all their own way. When the report of the first grand *coup* of their submarines reached them—namely, the sinking, on September 22, 1914, “in one red burial blent,” of the *Cressy*, *Hogue*, and *Aboukir*—their ecstasy of rejoicing seemed to them to require public expression. The Hun colony of Santa Cruz, Teneriffe, formed up accordingly, in a column four deep, at the top of the steep road leading past the chief residences, and at the word of command they goose-stepped down the hill into the town, shouting “Hoch!” at each step. Unfortunately for them, they forgot that the foreign club of Santa Cruz is really a British club, although it had received in “visiting membership” a considerable number of non-British residents, including Germans. Some debate had already taken place in the committee since war had been declared, as to whether those who had suddenly become “enemies” should be asked to resign; but in the state of feeling then prevailing, and in view of the universal opinion that the war would soon be over, no steps of that sort had been taken. The “hoch-marsch,” however, when it took place, left no doubt about

the matter, and when the afternoon hours of that dry and blazing day had narrowed down to the blessed moment of iced cocktails before dinner, the goose-steppers, hoarse and hot, discovered that the hitherto open door was closed, and the bar barred against them. Loohaber no more!

The stopping of the wireless messages by no means ended the activities of these important outposts of the German intelligence system in the Atlantic islands. By one clever method and another their agents kept in touch with headquarters at home, and with their ships abroad—while any of them still floated—and probably were always made aware beforehand when any special German naval “stunt” was being undertaken.

Although we did not, perhaps, know what each especial enterprise was going to be, we soon got to learn when one was in hand, through the stories—quite probable and circumstantial in themselves—which were made to reach us through unimpeachable channels. They came, chiefly, as reports of sighting of submarines; and another favourite romance took the form of accounts of the lighting of signal fires on prominent points of different islands. The positions given, in either case, were such as, presumably, would carry us, and our eyes and activities generally, *away* from the scene where the “stunt” was to be stunted. These dodges had some success at first. By their means the German steamer

Crefeld managed to slip past our patrol one dark night, and to arrive at Santa Cruz in the early dawn of October 23, 1914. She had on board her the crews of thirteen British ships, destroyed by the *Karlsruhe* off South America, and, accordingly, would have been a most satisfactory capture for us.

At the same time, and from a similar cause, one of the German steamers sheltering at Las Palmas made a bolt for it, and reached her next "base" (as in rounders) at Santa Cruz, without being caught on the high seas in between.

One of the many "submarine scares" was put about in the following audacious manner. A certain neutral steamer, southward bound, put into St Vincent, Cape de Verde Islands. On arrival, her captain went to the British Consulate and reported, quite gratuitously and deliberately, that he had been held up by a large German submarine when twenty miles northward of Teneriffe; that he had been boarded and searched, and finally, allowed to proceed on his journey, having been ordered by the German boarding-officer to say nothing to anybody about the incident, but felt it was his duty, &c. The report reached us, as it was intended to do, in due course. It was all entirely untrue, as was proved without difficulty. The captain had evidently been paid to start this "yarn" by some German at Santa Cruz, where the steamer had called on her way south. The matter was reported officially

to his Government, and that injudicious sailing-master gave up his profession somewhat summarily, if unwillingly, for a period sufficiently long to prevent any repetition of un-neutral behaviour.

At the same time, it was a mystery to us why Germany did not send out submarines to our waters earlier than she did. With all those friends posted on so many islands, there would have been little difficulty in supplying them with the necessary information to "bag" each one of our large and helpless cruisers, whether fighting or "merchant." They might even have got stores and provisions, without discovery, from the more distant islands.

We were always expecting submarines; and that is partly the reason of our never having been able to remain at anchor at night, and only with the most stringent precautionary measures when coaling in harbour by day.

Our sea-keeping records became quite Nelsonic in character. The Admiral and staff, for example, at one time spent 385 consecutive nights under way at sea, and each of the cruisers under his command spent periods running into four, five, and six months, during which they kept at sea all day and all night, except when obliged to coal ship. Coaling was arranged to be a daylight job; we were always off and away again before sunset. We had no base nearer than Gibraltar, a thousand miles distant, and International

Law forbade us from remaining for more than forty-eight hours in the neutral waters of Madeira or the Canary Islands; a facility that could only be taken advantage of in order to coal and provision sufficiently to enable the ship to reach "the nearest port," or in case of distress.

But for any of our ships to have included "night time" in their stay would have been little short of madness. There is no real "port" in any of these islands; the anchorages are all completely open roadsteads, past which tramp-steamers continually stream in both directions, either plodding out to South America or hammering home against the N.E. trade-wind. The islands lie right in the trade-route, and, on passing, vessels are accustomed to "make their numbers" and get their orders. Nothing, therefore, would have been easier than for a "raider," disguised as one of these tramps, to carry torpedoes and men who knew how to fire them, and, passing by at night, to have "let rip" at the long broadside of any of our cruisers (had one been there) lying comfortable, but helpless, under the shore. While we were coal-ing we had always a steamboat patrolling up and down outside the roadstead. She was fitted with "wireless" for communication with the ship, and a surprise attack would have been difficult, though not entirely impossible.

As a matter of fact, not long afterwards, even the legal restriction of "neutral waters"

existed no more, so far as Madeira, Azores, and the Cape de Verde Islands were concerned; for, in March 1916, Portugal entered the Alliance in regular fashion, through Germany having declared war against the Republic, and these cobweb barriers then became entirely swept away.

At the start of our "holding-up" career, we still maintained the more or less polite sea-manners of peace time if always *de haut en bas*; but as the war progressed, we gradually got ruder and ruder, until, at the latter end, flag signals were almost entirely given up in favour of the immediate and quite unmistakable message of a shot across the bows. This, intended by the authorities to be used only as a last resort, was easily first in effectiveness—and in economy of time, coal, and temper all round. Perhaps the Prussians are right, occasionally, after all, with their doctrine of the rattled sabre!

When the disguising of commerce raiders as merchant vessels—a possibility which had already lent piquancy to many a "boarding" expedition—became at last a reality, methods of extreme caution had to be adopted. Even at four miles' distance there was an excellent chance of being torpedoed by an apparently harmless tramp; and, keeping at that respectable range (as then became the careful fashion), messages could be delivered only "at the cannon's mouth." Away in those desolate seas, hundreds of miles from docks for repairs—and

often, even from the Islands (if beaching the ship became necessary)—to have caught a Tartar would indeed have been serious.

So, by degrees, and in proportion as our "Intelligence" got more frequent and reliable, we gave up boarding, on chance, every stranger we saw (except certain pet Scandinavians), and seized upon those only concerning which we had dependable reports. That kept us quite sufficiently busy: there were always persons travelling to Europe from South America, and elsewhere, who were "wanted"; and the Boarding Officer often had a long and difficult job, searching "manifests" and passenger-lists; parading passengers and crew; also in searching cabins for documents and holds for contraband cargo. It was not without its alleviations.

On one occasion, we had definite information that five Germans were returning from Angola by a small Portuguese steamer. (This was in the days before Portugal "came in.") The vessel was intercepted, and boarded. After a delay of about half an hour, the Boarding Officer reported by signal that he could find only four, out of the five, "wanted" men. We were absolutely assured that five were there, so a further search was ordered. This was carried out; again without result. The Boarding Officer accordingly was ordered to return with the four. One Hun, more or less, was not worth more of our time—still less the time of

the merchant vessel, anxious to proceed on her way. Watching the proceedings through our glasses, however, we missed the cheerful alacrity of return, usual on the receipt of the signal to "Allow steamer to proceed"; and five minutes went by before our boarding boat shoved off, and began to pull back to us with the "prisoners of war." On his return, the Boarding Officer reported that, just as he was stepping down the ladder into the boat, where his four captives had already preceded him, one of the steamer's passengers, a Dane, who during the search had discovered that the Boarding Officer could speak his language, came forward, and, while apparently merely saying goodbye, told him hurriedly in Danish of another spot in the ship in which to look for Number Five. Two of our men were immediately called up out of the boat, and directed to the fore-part of the upper deck, where, under the shelter of a diminutive fore-castle, there stood a large dog-kennel. Two tarry pairs of hands, on being thrust in at the entrance thereof, seized two recalcitrant Hun legs, and drew forth their owner—as it were, a wrinkle from its shell—the fifth and last of our unwilling guests!

On every succeeding day, until at last they were safely deposited in the Hunitarium at Gibraltar, our prisoners of war, as they marched in file past the saloon entrance on their way to dinner, looked in at us through the doorless orifice, as we sat at our meal; and, on sighting the

Captain, each in turn bowed low: a most embarrassing politeness!

The capturing of contraband cargo had to be dealt with by quite different, and less satisfactory, methods from that with contraband passengers, who could summarily be removed and "juggled."

Under the new regulations forced on us at the outbreak of war, we would have been justified in copying the German method in sinking contraband cargoes and the ships that carried them; but (in our old-fashioned way) we scorned this method, and preferred the sending in of such ships to a British port, under a prize crew, for adjudication according to law. We were too trusting, and we should have done our country a better service in destroying such cargoes offhand. We did not then know that it was possible to override the ancient and sacred international regulations, and that these upholders of law and of the "lawful occasion"—the Prize Court, and the admirals—could be blown aside, so that the blockade of Germany could be penetrated. Let us hope that this undermining of naval authority was not based on treachery, and was inspired only by cowardice. "We were afraid of Neutral opinion!"—an admission more remarkable for its candour than its courage.

One evening, when we were patrolling southward of Las Palmas, there came thumping along against the N.-E. trade-

wind, as already she had thumped for many days, on her northward journey from "the Plate," a fat Greek steamer, carrying between 4000 and 5000 tons of Indian corn.

We boarded her, and the captain, a Greek, speaking perfect English, and holding a British sailing-master's certificate, kindly volunteered the information that his cargo had been put on board by a German firm in the Argentine, to the order of a German officer, who had been sent out specially to buy grain for man and beast engaged in the war. Further, this officer had besought the captain, with large sums of money (but unavailingly), to allow him to take passage in the ship as supercargo, in order to keep the precious corn on the straight road. (For there was no corn in Egypt.)

The cargo was consigned to a bank in Zurich (which is about twenty miles from Germany), and was to be landed at Genoa, at that time a "neutral" port. Her papers supported these statements: there was no doubt, anyway, about the nationality of the firm consigning the corn, and very little as to its *real* destination. A prize officer and prize crew were put on board the steamer, and she was ordered in to Gibraltar, to be placed in the hands of the marshal of the prize court, with all the necessary affidavits made out and signed. A few days later, we followed our prize into Gibraltar to re-embark the prize crew. On

arrival, we learnt that, upon reporting home the fact of the vessel's arrival for placing in the prize court, orders had been received that the steamer was "to proceed on her voyage"; and a few hours later we endured the chagrin of seeing her steam away, eastward to Genoa, politely dipping her colours as she passed

us at anchor in the Bay. This sensitive conscientiousness—rendering unto the Kaiser the things that were the lawful prize of His Majesty's ships—was no doubt thoroughly appreciated by the Hun horse artillery, to whom the contents of the vessel were specially dedicated. "Deutschland über alles!"

III.

The war had not been going on for more than a few minutes before we cruiser-people realised that "wireless" would be our greatest friend and assistant if employed only for taking in messages, but might easily become our deadliest foe and danger if we ourselves made signals by its means. As likely as not, the enemy might be listening somewhere within the radius of disturbed ether, into which our dots and dashes were splashing, as pebbles into a pool, showing him that we were in his neighbourhood, while the "strength" of the signals would give him a fair idea of his actual distance from their source. Vague as this information of a ship's whereabouts may seem, it is not difficult to combine it with other contributory facts and then to translate the whole into real "Intelligence." It needs only a little experience to become expert in this; but, for all that, it was some considerable time before the ocean-going world of Watsons became fully instructed Sherlock Holmeses in correctly reading the indications.

Every British merchant vessel, accordingly, was warned against making even the slightest "wireless" sound, and in order to supplement the warning, as well as to fix responsibility, there was fitted in the captain's cabin of each ship a switch on the aerial, looked in a box, by which the ships operators (all of them inveterate talkers) were absolutely prevented from sending out any unauthorised message. Until this was done nothing could stop the usual "Good morning, old man, have you anything for us?" with which the Atlantic ether, in the early days of the war, was continually being burdened. Every steamer carried its cheery and chatty "old man," quite capable of giving away not only himself, but others, including us cruisers.

As for ourselves, we became dumb as fishes, but listened unceasingly, with wireless ears "hauled out to a bowline," if such a simile of the oldest Old Navy may suitably be applied to the affairs of the Newest New.

No one would believe the

quantity of useful information that reached us through this means, nor realise the numbers of perfect damn fools that (in spite of all warnings and precautions) then were going about. They gave away everything that any enemy ship might like to know—we heard them. Fortunate indeed it was for them that so few Germans were there to catch and sink them. Discretion was learnt later on, but only when far too many eggs had been broken in the making of omelettes of experience.

It is not possible to vouch for the absolute truth of the following "wireless" incidents, as they came from a German source; but there was no particular reason for inventing them gratuitously, nor were they in themselves impossible in the opening days of the war. The *Emden* was at the time pursuing her wicked and wily way through the Indian Ocean, being herself pursued (as she knew) by H.M.S. *Hampshire*. There are several powerful radio-stations ashore at Madras, Penang, Rangoon, and elsewhere in those latitudes, and one night the *Emden* intercepted the following conversation, *en clair*, between two of them.

"What ship is called up by the letters XYZ?" (Every ship fitted with wireless has a group of three letters, as above, allotted to it, and known as a "call-sign," by which it is "called up." Her own name is never used, even during peace, and in war-time naval vessels are given special secret

call-signs, which are changed at frequent intervals.)

Reply: "That is the secret call-sign of the *Hampshire*,"—which was exactly what the *Emden* wanted to know! This was very kind of the "shore"; and so was an announcement on another night, made similarly *urbi et orbi*, and in plain English, detailing the dates, the ports they sailed from, and even the names of the cruisers proceeding in pursuit of the *Emden*! No wonder that none of them caught her; and that the poor *Hampshire* travelled about 17,000 miles on that hot chase, day after day, night after tropical night, in a pursuit thus rendered entirely vain! She hadn't a dog's chance in such circumstances.

The Germans, little appreciating how we listened for them, laboured under a serious disability, through their ships—both naval and merchant—being fitted exclusively with the *Telefunken* apparatus.

At the beginning of the war, no other nation's ships possessed this wireless "set." The "note" made by it has a quite peculiar and unmistakable sound, and when heard it told us, without any doubt, that the enemy was at hand. "Ware rats!" it said. The rest of the nomad population of the Atlantic, as well as the radio-stations on shore, had "notes" all of about the same tone, and (except by their superior clearness) our ships' Naval sets could not easily be distinguished from other ship installations. Armed merchant

cruisers were fitted with Marconi sets, and there was therefore no difference at all between theirs and those of other merchant shipping.

Once, when we were coming through the Cape de Verde group of islands, we intercepted some rather mangled messages, undoubtedly made by *Telefunken*, and therefore, as undoubtedly, made by a German ship. They appeared to come from a vessel at no great distance; and we proceeded on our way, keenly interested, but, none the less, with considerable caution. The latter especially, since several warnings had reached us that certain points in the island group had been arranged by the enemy as rendezvous for their cruisers.

Thus proceeding, we espied, anchored off one of the most desert-like of the islands, a steamer under British colours, loading salt. We approached her and made, by signal, the "Demand." There was no reply, but we saw on her stern a name, *Liberia*, not given in 'Lloyd's Register of Shipping' (a publication in which appears the name of every vessel afloat). The painting of the name was obviously a recent and amateur effort. Not only that—we could see that the original name of the ship had, as recently, been plastered over with still shiny black, to form a background for the new version. Deeply suspicious, we dropped anchor near her and sent a boat to visit and inquire concerning her. We were both in "neutral waters," and caution was all the more necessary.

The story brought back was so peculiar that it was considered advisable to convey the ship at once to Sierra Leone, for a legal investigation either by the Marine Court or Prize Court as might appear the more suitable.

It seems that there was an old nigger, and his name was Uncle Sam—Alfred Charles Sam, to be exact—who had, long years before, emigrated from his Gold Coast home to the U.S.A. There, while comfortably filling his bank credit account with the fruits of honest labour, he seems also to have filled his soul with indignation at the treatment of his brudders. The two floods, being mingled, then overflowed in a stream sufficiently deep to permit of the floating on its bosom of a trading venture, an argosy manned exclusively by negroes, formed into an association, whose declared intention it was to establish itself as the nucleus of a free and self-governing colony in the ancestral African home of the race, and to become a second Liberia. The next step was the conveyance of the Brudderhood, with its fortunes, across the waters between America and Africa. Accordingly Sam, this second Noah (though perhaps a reference to Ham, his black son and co-navigator, would be more suitable), purchased, from a German firm, an ark of such antiquity that it might conceivably have been the original and Biblical article. The mode of propulsion, however, had been brought up to

date forty or fifty years ago, and the craft was now fitted with a wheezy old boiler and arthritic engines, which groaned aloud at every revolution.

Sam paid the price for her—the German price—namely, £14,000, the ship being actually worth, perhaps, the hundredth part of that figure.

These preliminaries accomplished, the expedition embarked at Barbadoes, and set forth across the Atlantic.

Its arrival in the Cape de Verde Islands must remain one of the classic instances of Heaven's reply to prayer, for never did ship make voyage with less assistance from the arts, either of the navigator or the marine engineer. Neither the "captain" nor any of the "officers" possessed "tickets" of any kind, declaring their competence as "master mariner," or even as "mate"; nor did the "chief engineer" hold any official permission to take charge of a ship's engines.

"Me, sah," said the second mate to our boarding officer, "I done teach navigation, sah, in unahvahsaty, sah, for seventeen yeah, sah, but dis my fust 'speriance afloat, sah!"

Said the first mate: "Dis good ship, sah; nothing wrong heah, sah—gawspel all de time!"

So it was! The enterprise was, apparently, not only in pursuit of liberty, based on commerce, but also was largely concerned with religion. Missionaries were carried in the company, black of face, white of wool, who kept themselves in practice, and at the same

time relieved the hot tedium of the voyage, by the most energetic and reviving expositions of holy writ, while the ark pursued her tranquil, four-knot, eastward course.

Large and comfortable old mammies sat round the upper deck in the seaking heat of the tropical afternoon, the open Bible cushioned in each ample lap. But if and when the fervour of the temperature mastered that of the preacher, and the tired brains glided softly down the forty steps of slumber—every step a wink—bearing forward on to the billowing black bosoms, the woolly heads, bandanna-swathed,—*whack!* down descended on them the Written Word, with all the force and energy of missionary zeal and of two old but still brawny arms! Printed in the heaviest type, bound in half-calf, boards, tall quarte, nothing but the African skull could withstand such an onslaught and an awakening!

Thus were these interminable stump sermons punctuated, as witnessed by our fortunate Prize Officer on the passage to Sierra Leone.

When he and the "navigating party" went on board, and it was ordered to put steam on the cable-winch in order to heave up the anchor, the steam-pipe leading along the upper deck to the winch from the boiler immediately burst, and thick white columns of steam were to be seen ascending. The chief engineer, with creditable promptitude, seized a length of "sennit,"

dashed up the engine-room ladder, and, as he came out on to the upper deck, caught up the oir door-mat at his feet, which, with a forlorn hopefulness, he bound with the sennit swiftly around the hissing fissure. But not even then could the windlass be induced to revolve; so the cable, quite happily, was out, and the crazy old craft waddled out slowly and fitfully to sea. Mr Heath Robinson alone would be capable of depicting with any certainty the scene. It went much beyond the limits of ordinary fancy.

But the points about the ship which really interested us much more than any mere illegalities of the navigating and engineering officers were—first, the Telefunken wireless “set” with which she was fitted; and secondly, the man who worked it.

The apparatus itself was undoubtedly German (the vessel herself having so recently been in German ownership); and its operator, who was the only white man in the ship, while proclaiming himself to be a citizen of the United States, bore the unpleasing name of Schneider. He had no “certificate” enabling him to operate on board ship; but that was a trifle light as air by comparison with the suspicious character of the whole *galère*.

It was this “Telefunken” whose voice we had heard in startling propinquity the day before; and it seemed likely that, in spite of the envelop-

ing Nigger Party—indeed, on account of it and of the admirable if innocent camouflage it provided—here we had dropped on to a “passer-on” of wireless messages between the German cruisers of South America and their Intelligence agents ashore in Africa or in the islands. The Telefunken note would be to them a *Shibboleth*, assuring them of the German source of the intelligence; and also that the news sent by it could not possibly be an enemy deception, but might safely be acted upon.

On our arrival at Sierra Leone we handed the *Liberia* over, with the necessary documents, to the authorities. We then almost immediately received orders to leave for other scenes. This was unfortunate; for, so far as we could learn later, no inquiries were made as to the *bona fides* of Mr Schneider, and nothing was done either to ship, officers, or passengers, save to prevent the latter from establishing the Free Colony of their dreams. This idea was, indeed, not welcomed in Sierra Leone. The existing Black Republic of Liberia, their next-door neighbour—now a sanctuary for every known variety of blackguard—was considered amply sufficient for the present, thank you, without starting a similar show having similar future possibilities, even though it was to be inaugurated by saints.

As regards the undoubted illegal status of the ship as a merchant vessel, and the irreg-

ular "clearance" she had received at Barbadoes, it was apparently considered inadvisable by the officials at Sierra Leone to make too drastic an investigation into the affair. Sierra Leone and Barbadoes are, each of them, Crown colonies. Dog will not eat dog. Perhaps the other dog could bite too!

As to the "wireless" considerations, including the status of Schneider, these were as usual outside the shore-going brain capacity, not only for comprehension but for taking any action. "There was no precedent"—and that was all about it! In the next war the sailor, warned by this as by many another instance, will act for himself, and will not be so hopeful of assistance from those whose fingers

have not been taught to fight, and have no desire to learn.

Had we seized, without reference to the courts, that Telefunken set and installed it in our own ship, what fun might we not have had with it, using it as a decoy for the German cruisers! It might have produced wonderful results. This notion, though advocated, simple as it sounds, could not, however, penetrate (owing possibly to the depth of the wig) to the legal brain.

So the budding negro republic wilted and fell to the ground untimely. As little trace must by now remain of it, as of the rusty old box of tricks which carried its fortunes across the broad Atlantic. And Schneider, where is he? *Quien sabe?*

(To be continued.)